

COLLECTION OVERVIEW

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

I. SCOPE

This overview focuses on materials about African American history and culture. The study of African Americans, i.e. persons of African heritage in the United States, is a subset of American studies, but also requires the use of resources relating to the history, literature, and other aspects of the culture of people in various countries in Africa and in other countries where black people have lived. The collections at the Library are organized in such a way that the African and Middle Eastern Division is responsible for resources relating to the African continent, while the Hispanic Division holds primary responsibility for Afro-Caribbean resources. The resources represented in the Library's collections and accessible to the Library's users include most formats: books, manuscripts, newspapers, serials, microform, motion pictures, sound recordings, maps, photographs, online databases, digital collections, and other formats. African American history and culture, as an area of study, is classified throughout the Library of Congress classification scheme, including, but not limited to: E185 (United States history), E441-453 (Slavery in the United States), PS3500's (Literature), BR563.N4 (African American religion), etc.

II. SIZE

The materials in the area of African American history and culture are classified with the specific subject in the Library of Congress classification scheme (A-Z) and not by a specific class of persons or racial group. This practice, along with the absence of a separate or special African American collection, impedes an accurate estimation of its size. No special count has been made of all subject areas comprising African American history and culture. This is because the subject matter is spread throughout the general collections in history, literature, slavery and the slave trade, the Civil War, civil rights, etc.

III. GENERAL RESEARCH STRENGTHS

The Library's resources in the area of African American history and culture are unparalleled, due in large part to the vast resources that were largely acquired through copyright deposit. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the field, the materials are scattered throughout the classified collections and are also well represented in the Library's large collection of United States government and official publications.

The strength of the African American resources in the General Collections is greatly enhanced by the number of related resources available in the Library's special collections. These materials include manuscripts, microform, oral history transcripts and recordings, folk archives, newspapers, periodicals, legal works, music, recorded sound, motion pictures, prints and photographs, maps and atlases, and subscription databases.

IV. ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

The Library subscribes to a vast number of electronic resources and has created online collections of digitized books, documents, and other materials.

These electronic resources cover a wide range of subjects useful for the study of African American history and culture. Several databases focus solely on African American subjects, while other products are interdisciplinary. For example, Chadwyck-Healey's *Black Biographical Dictionaries 1790-1950*; *Index to Black Resources* (1948-1986); *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*' full-text and full-image database of three African American newspapers: *Chicago Defender* (1905-1975), *Amsterdam News* (1922-1993), and *Pittsburgh Courier* (1911-2002); African American Newspapers from the 19th century, including: *Freedom's Journal*, 1827-1829; *The Christian Recorder*, 1861-1893; *The Coloured American*, 1837-1841; *Frederick Douglass Paper*, 1851-1855; *The North Star*, 1847-1851. The interdisciplinary electronic resources include: *Digital Dissertations*; *Humanities and Social Sciences Retrospective, 1907-1984*; *America: History & Life*; and *MLA International Bibliography*.

The Library of Congress' American Memory Collection provides access to several digital collections created by the Library or created by the Library, in partnership, with other institutions. These include: *African American Perspectives: Pamphlets from the Daniel A. P. Murray Collection, 1818-1907*; *The African-American Experience in Ohio: Selections from the Ohio Historical Society, 1850-1920*; *From Slavery to Freedom: The African-American Pamphlet Collection, 1824-1909*; *African-American Sheet Music, 1850-1920: Selected from the Collections of Brown University*; *African American Odyssey*; *By Popular Demand: Jackie Robinson and Other Baseball Highlights, 1860s-1960s*; *An American Time Capsule: Three Centuries of Broadides and Other Printed Ephemera*; *The Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress, 1841-1964*; *The Zora Neale Hurston Plays at the Library of Congress, 1925-1944*; *Maps of Liberia, 1830-1870*; *Slaves and the Courts, 1740-1860*; *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938*; *Voices from the Days of Slavery: Former Slaves Tell Their Stories, 1932-1975*.

V. AREAS OF DISTINCTION

Subject areas where resources are especially strong include: slavery; the slave trade; slave narratives; abolitionist movement and anti-slavery publications; the Civil War and its literature; lynching; riots; and, civil disturbances.

The Library's Manuscript Division has virtually unparalleled collections of the organizational records of civil rights organizations and the personal papers of the leaders. Examples include the records of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund; the National Urban League; the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights; A. Philip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE); the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; the personal papers of Justice Thurgood Marshall; Martin Luther King, Jr. FBI Files; and others.

Also of particular importance are: the Slave Narrative Collection available through several venues such as the American Memory Collection, the Microform Collection, and the Manuscript Division; the Daniel A.P. Murray pamphlet and black authors collections, and the collection of broadsides, both also available via American Memory and in the Rare Book and Special Collections Division. The recorded sound and music collections contain outstanding material for the study of African American music, and the folklore and oral history collections in the American Folklife Center are outstanding.

Important collections in the Microform Reading Room include: *Abolitionist Periodicals*, *Black Literature, 1827-1940*, *Black Workers in the Era of the Great Migration, 1916-1929*, and *Schomburg Center Clipping File (1925-1988)*.

Other important collections include materials on the Civil War, such as regimental histories, military histories, and publications of both the Confederate and Union armies. The Law Library of Congress holds extensive collections tracing the legal history of African Americans from the Early Republic period to the Civil Rights era to the present.

United States government resources, such as the Congressional hearings, the *Congressional Record*, the *United States Serial Set*, and publications of federal government agencies are also important resources for the area of African American history and culture.

VI. WEAKNESSES/EXCLUSIONS

Pamphlets and other published works created by African American organizations have not been systematically or consistently acquired because these publications generally do not come to the Library via copyright deposits and they are extremely difficult to identify and acquire. Many of the records for African American organizations, especially magazines and newsletters were not selected and/or acquired upon publication because of the failure to recognize their scholarly value. Scholars now recognize the significance of these organizations in the various struggles for freedom and equality. Scholarship, world-wide, is now focusing on these benevolent and fraternal organizations. Of particular interest are the publications issued by African American fraternal orders, benevolent, and other organizations that include the various bodies that comprise the Prince Hall Masonic Organization; Grand United Order of Fishermen of Galilee; and the Grand United Order of Tents. Also included in this category are the works by African American Greek-letter fraternities and sororities, and African American professional organizations.

Self-published works are not acquired by the Library pursuant to current selection policy. In the case of African American history and culture, historically mainstream publishers have neglected African Americans in all fields, thus making it necessary for them to turn to small, independent, and vanity presses.

African American photographs are not represented as adequately as history would warrant. However, the Library's collections are as strong as any other major research library, and the Library is actively pursuing the acquisition of photographs in this area. The Library of Congress photograph collection draws its strength from the materials in the Farm Security Administration

collection that documents African American life and history, its NAACP collection, the W.E.B. DuBois albums, the Frances Benjamin Johnson photographs of historically black institutions, and the Gordon Parks Collection.

The Library's collections of the personal papers of historical African American leaders, educators, and politicians are notable. The Manuscript Division has the papers of several prominent African American creative writers, artists, and scientists. Among these are the recently discovered manuscripts of Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, James Emanuel, etc. However, the Library lacks many sound recordings of speeches and conferences by famous or noted African Americans.